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Sexual Assault in Canada 2004 and 2007

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Sexual Assault in Canada

2004 and 2007

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Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued cooperation and goodwill.

Preface

This series of profiles provides analysis on a variety of topics and issues concerning victimization, offending and public perceptions of crime and the justice system. The profiles primarily draw on results from the General Social Survey on victimization. Where applicable, they also incorporate information from other data sources, such as the Census of Population and the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Examples of the topics explored through this series include: Victimization and offending in Canada's territories, Canadians' use of crime prevention measures and Victimization of older Canadians. This is a unique periodical, of great interest to those who plan, establish, administer and evaluate justice programs and projects, or anyone who has an interest in Canada's justice system.

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Highlights

- About one in ten sexual assaults is reported to police, according to the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization. With only a small proportion of sexual offences formally documented through law enforcement, the prevalence of sexual assault in Canada has been difficult to quantify.

- According to the 2004 GSS, there were about 512,000 incidents of sexual assault, representing a rate of 1,977 incidents per 100,000 population aged 15 and older. Given that most sexual assaults go unreported, police-reported sexual assault counts are notably lower, with about 24,200 sexual offences recorded by police in 2007.

- Victimization data suggest that the rates of sexual assault remained stable in recent years. However, police-reported data reveal a steady decline in offences coming to the attention of law enforcement for more than a decade.

- The majority of sexual offences in Canada are of a less severe nature. Victimization data indicate that most sexual assaults involved unwanted sexual touching (81%) rather than more severe sexual attacks (19%). Among the incidents that came to the attention of police in 2007, the large majority (86%) were level 1, the least serious form of sexual assault.

- The 2004 GSS showed that sexual victimization rates were dramatically higher among those aged 15 to 24, compared to those 55 and over. Additionally, over half of the sexual assault victims reported to police in 2007 were children and youth under the age of 18.

- When asked why they did not tell the police about the sexual assault, a majority of victims (58%) said that they did not report the incident because it was not important enough.

- While few sexual assault victims filed formal reports with police, most (72%) confided in friends and many turned to family (41%) and other informal sources of support.

- Similar to victims of other forms of violent crime, sexual assault victims commonly experienced anger, confusion and frustration as a result of their victimization.

Introduction

It has been 25 years since the first legislative reforms were implemented to help increase victim willingness to report sexual assaults to police (Kong, Johnson, Beattie and Cardillo, 2003; Integration and Analysis Program, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1999). In 1983, the *Criminal Code of Canada* was amended to replace the crimes of rape and indecent assault with three new sexual assault offences, which focus on the violent rather than sexual nature of the offence. In addition, the new legislation clarified that males or females could be the victim of sexual assault. The reforms also made it clear that the spouse of a victim could be charged with sexual assault.

Research suggests that many victims continue to perceive sexual victimization as a private matter and most do not disclose their victimization to any formal source (Sable et al. 2006; Felson and Paré, 2005). Given that only a small proportion of sexual offences are formally documented, the prevalence of sexual assault in Canada has been difficult to quantify.

Text box 1
Definitions

Sexual assault: A term used to refer to all incidents of unwanted sexual activity, including sexual attacks and sexual touching.

General Social Survey (GSS)

To assess whether the respondent had been a victim of a sexual attack, the GSS asked respondents aged 15 years and older if anyone had forced or attempted to force them into any unwanted sexual activity by threatening them, holding them down or hurting them within the 12 months preceding the survey. To assess the prevalence of unwanted sexual touching, respondents were asked if anyone had ever touched them in a sexual way against their will, including acts of grabbing, kissing or fondling, using the following questions:

Sexual attack: During the past 12 months, has anyone forced you or attempted to force you into any unwanted sexual activity, by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way?
Unwanted sexual touching: During the past 12 months, has anyone ever touched you against your will in any sexual way? By this I mean anything from unwanted touching or grabbing, to kissing or fondling.

Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR2)

The incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey captures criminal incidents that have come to the attention of the police, which includes 4 different types of sexual offences as defined by the *Criminal Code*.

Sexual assault level 1 (s.271): An assault committed in circumstances of a sexual nature such that the sexual integrity of the victim is violated. Level 1 involves minor physical injuries or no injuries to the victim.
Sexual assault level 2 (s.272): Sexual assault with a weapon, threats, or causing bodily harm.
Aggravated sexual assault (level 3): Sexual assault that results in wounding, maiming, disfiguring or endangering the life of the victim.
Other sexual offences: A group of offences that are meant to primarily address incidents of sexual abuse directed at children. The *Criminal Code* offences included in this category are: Sexual interference (s.151), Invitation to sexual touching (s.152), Sexual exploitation (s.153), Incest (s.155), Anal intercourse (s.159), and Bestiality (s.160).

Two related offences, not included under the definition of sexual offences in this report, are indecent acts (s.173) and corrupting morals (s.163).

Using data from the 1999 and 2004 General Social Surveys (GSS) on victimization and police-reported data derived from the aggregate Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) and the incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR2),[1] the prevalence and nature of sexual assault in Canada is examined. Specifically, this report examines rates of sexual victimization; characteristics of victims and offenders; rates of police reporting; reasons for not reporting to police; the emotional effects of sexual victimization; as well as fear of crime and the use of precautionary measures by victims of sexual assault.

Trends in sexual offences

Quantifying sexual assault continues to be a challenge, since the large majority (91%) of these crimes are not reported to police. According to self-reported victim data from the 2004 GSS on Victimization, approximately 512,200 Canadians aged 15 and older[2] were the victims of a sexual assault in the 12 months preceding the survey.[3] Expressed as a rate, there were 1,977 incidents of sexual assault per 100,000 population aged 15 and older reported on the 2004 GSS; a rate not statistically different from that of the 1999 GSS (2,058 per 100,000 population).

Fewer than one in ten sexual assault victims report crime to the police

Of the three types of violent offences recorded by the GSS, sexual assault was the least likely to be reported to the police. Less than one in ten incidents of sexual assault were reported to the police, a proportion significantly lower than that for the other violent offences, robbery (47%) and physical assault (40%).

Incidents of sexual touching were less likely to be reported to police than incidents of sexual attack, with 94% incidents of sexual touching going unreported versus 78% of sexual attacks. This may be due to the fact that incidents of sexual touching are considered less serious and less likely to result in physical injury, and research suggests that less serious forms of crime and those not involving physical injury are less likely to be reported to the police (Gannon and Mihorean, 2005).

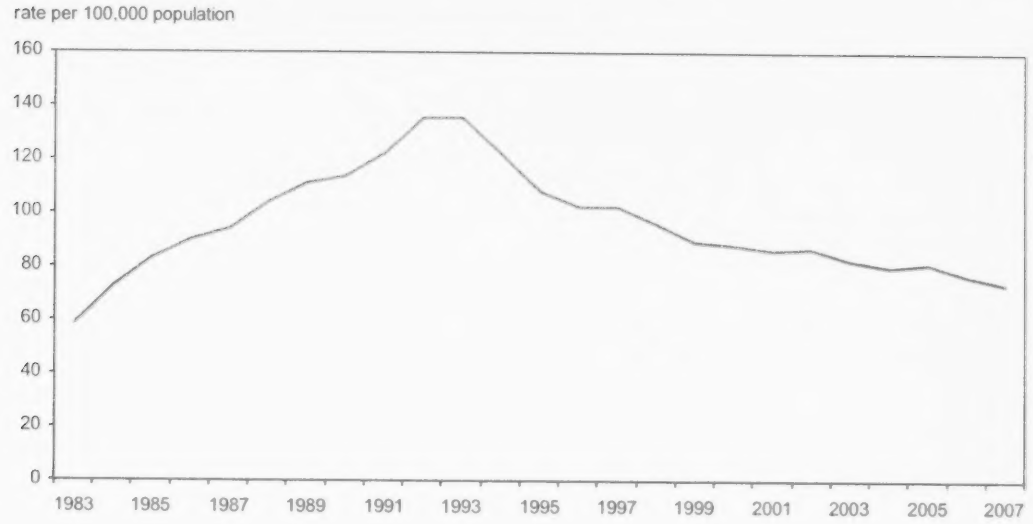
Victims of both forms of sexual assault generally had similar reasons for not reporting the incident to the police. The most commonly stated reason why victims of sexual assault did not report the incident to the police was because they felt it was not important enough (58%). Victims also stated that they did not report to police because the incident was dealt with in another way (54%); they felt that it was a personal matter (47%); or they did not want to get involved with the police (41%).[4] Previous research has also shown these sentiments to be common barriers to reporting sexual crimes (Sable et al., 2006). Generally, the reasons for not reporting to police given by sexual assault victims were similar to those offered by victims of other violent crimes. However, a significant difference was found between the proportion of sexual assault victims (47%) and those experiencing other forms of violent crime (39%) who indicated that they did not involve the police because they felt the incident was a personal matter.

Police-reported data show lower sexual assault rates compared to victimization data

A small fraction of sexual assaults are reported to police. Hence, as expected, the numbers for sexual offences according to police-reported data are markedly lower, compared to figures from victimization surveys. Police-reported data indicate that in 2007, an estimated 24,200 sexual offences were brought to police-attention. At a rate of 73 per 100,000 Canadians, police-reported sexual offences were down 3% over the previous year, but still accounted for 8% of all police-reported violent crime in 2007.

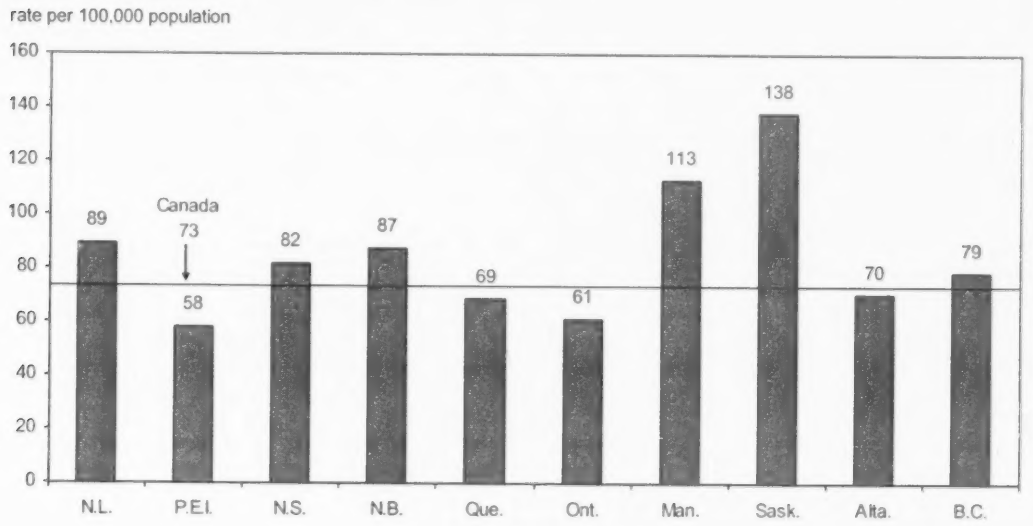
Looking back over the past 25 years of police-reported data, rates of sexual offences have fluctuated; rising notably for about the first decade, and then declining steadily thereafter. After the amendments to the *Criminal Code* in 1983, there was a steady rise in the overall rate of police-reported sexual offences, which continued until 1993; during this time, rates for police-reported sexual offence nearly doubled, rising from 59 per 100,000 Canadians to 136 per 100,000 (Chart 1). After peaking in 1993, the overall rate for sexual offences reported to police declined, paralleling the downward trend for violent offences in general (Kong et al., 2003). This trend was largely influenced by level 1 sexual assaults (the category with the least physical injury to the victim), as they account for the majority of sexual offence incidents reported to the police. Compared to level 1 sexual assault rates, rates for level 2 and level 3 sexual assaults, as well as other sexual offences were relatively stable throughout the period from 1983 to 2007.

Chart 1
Rates of police-reported sexual offences decline steadily after 1993 peak



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Chart 2
Provincial rates of police-reported sexual offences vary with Saskatchewan the highest and Prince Edward Island lowest



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2007.

While a notable increase in police-reported sexual offences did follow the 1983 changes to the *Criminal Code*, research has found that these legislative amendments alone were insufficient to explain the increase, and that other social change during this time period also contributed to the rise (Roberts and Gebotys, 1992; Roberts and Grossman, 1994; Department of Justice, 1985). Among these social changes, contend Clark and Hepworth (1994), were improvements to the social, economic and political status of women; a heightened focus on victims of crime and a growth in victim's services such as sexual assault centres; as well as special training of police officers and hospitals staff to respond to victims of sexual assault and gather evidence to be used at trial (Kong et al., 2003).

Rates of sexual offences reported to police vary widely across the provinces and territories[5]

According to police-reported data, in 2007, there was considerable variation in the overall rates of sexual offences reported to the police across Canada (Chart 2). Among the provinces, Saskatchewan (138 per 100,000 population) and Manitoba (113) had the highest rates, while Ontario (61) and Prince Edward Island (58) had the lowest. Total sexual offence rates for Quebec (69) and Alberta (70) were also below the national average of 73 sexual offences per 100,000 population. Overall, rates of sexual offences were highest in Nunavut (746), followed by Northwest Territories (518) and Yukon (203).

Because it is the most common of the four different types of sexual offences, level 1 sexual assault drove inter-provincial differences in rates for all sexual offences. Like the overall pattern for rates of all sexual offences combined, level 1 sexual assault rates were highest in Saskatchewan (119) and lowest in Prince Edward Island (51). In comparison, rates of sexual assault with a weapon (level 2) and aggravated sexual assault (level 3) were relatively low across all provinces, ranging from 1 to 3 per 100,000 population, while rates for other sexual offences ranged from a low of 5 per 100,000 population in Ontario to a high of 22 per 100,000 in New Brunswick.

While the occurrence of sexual assaults may vary across the country, there are also other possible explanations for the disparity in police-reported sexual assault rates among the provinces and territories. Such explanations include, for example, variations in public attitudes towards sexual assault which may influence reporting among victims,[6] differences in age demographics, the availability of victim services in the area, or police training (Kong et al., 2003).

Criminal justice system response to sexual offences

Sexual offences less likely than other violent crimes to be cleared by police

In general, sexual offences are less likely to be cleared by police than other types of violent offences. In 2007, charges were laid in over a third of sexual offences reported to police compared to almost half of other types of violent crime (Table 1).

Conviction rates lower but custodial sentences more likely for sexual offences versus other violent crimes tried in adult courts

In adult courts, sexual offences are less likely than other violent crime types to result in a finding of guilt. However, those found guilty of sexual offences in adult court are more likely to receive custodial sentences compared to those found guilty of other violent crimes. For example, in 2006/2007, prison terms were issued in more than half of adult-court convictions for sexual offences, compared to less than a third of convictions for other types of violent offences. (Table 2).

Unlike in adult courts, conviction rates for sexual offence cases in youth courts were higher compared to cases involving other types of violent crimes. In addition, sexual offenders sentenced in youth courts were less likely than other violent offenders to receive a custodial sentence (Table 2).

The differences in conviction and sentencing patterns between adults and youth can be partly explained by the fact that adults in general tend to be charged with more serious types of sexual offences which carry more serious penalties.

Table 1
Clearance status for police-reported sexual assaults and other violent crimes, 2007

	Not cleared	Cleared by charge	Cleared otherwise[1]
		percentage	
Total sexual offences	**37**	**42**	**21**
Level 1 - sexual assault	37	42	21
Level 2 - sexual assault with a weapon	47	45	9
Level 3 - aggravated sexual assault	28	68	4
Other sexual offences	37	37	26
Total other violent offences	**26**	**50**	**24**

1. 'Cleared otherwise' includes cases where the complainant requests that charges not be laid against the accused, the accused has died, the accused has diplomatic immunity, the accused is referred to a diversionary program, police discretion, or for a reason beyond the control of the police.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, 2007.

Table 2
Proportion of sexual offence cases resulting in a finding of guilt, sentenced to custody and sentenced to probation, Canada, 2006/2007

	Total sexual offences	Other violent crime
	percentage	
Proportion of cases with finding of guilty		
Adult courts	49	53
Youth courts	63	60
Proportion of convicted offenders sentenced to custody		
Adult courts	54	30
Youth courts	12	18
Proportion of convicted offenders sentenced to probation		
Adult courts	66	73
Youth courts	78	67

Notes: Figures represent the most serious offences in the case. The sentence types presented are not mutually exclusive.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Adult Criminal Court Survey and the Youth Court Survey.

The nature of sexual offences

Victimization and police-reported data both indicate that less severe forms of sexual assault are most common. According to the 2004 GSS, the majority (81%) of self-reported sexual assault incidents took the form of unwanted sexual touching while sexual attacks accounted for approximately 1 in 5 incidents (19%). Police also report that least serious types of sexual (level 1) assault comprise the majority (86%) of sexual offences. The more serious forms of sexual assault[7] and other sexual offences, such as invitation to sexual touching and sexual exploitation, made up the remaining 14%.

Females and young people experience higher rates of sexual assault

Consistent with literature in the area (Sable et al., 2006), both police and victimization data indicate that rates of sexual victimization are higher among females, regardless of the type of sexual assault experienced (Table 3). The 2004 GSS show that sexual victimization rates for females were almost 5 times the rate for males (3,248 incidents per 100,000 versus 664 incidents per 100,000). Similarly, police-reported data for 2007 indicate that female rates of sexual victimization were 5.6 times higher than male rates (120 versus 21 per 100,000 population).[8]

Table 3
Number and rate of sexual victimization by victim characteristics, 1999 and 2004

	1999		2004	
	Incidents (in thousands)	Rate per 100,000 (population 15 and over)	Incidents (in thousands)	Rate per 100,000 (population 15 and over)
	number	rate	number	rate
Total	**499**	**2,058**	**512**	**1,977**
Sex				
Females	407	3,302	427	3,248
Males	92[E]	774[E]	85	664[E]
Age (years)				
15 to 24	248	6,053	238	5,563
25 to 34	126	2,837	128	2,892
35 to 44	74[E]	1,414[E]	89	1,724[E]
45 to 54	43[E]	1,021[E]	F	F
55 and over	F	F	F	F
Main activity				
Working	235	1,778	252	1,687
Looking for work	F	F	F	F
Going to school	145	4,860	177	5,548
Household work[1]	57[E]	2,786[E]	F	F
Retired	F	F	F	F
Other	F	F	F	F
Don't know/ not stated	F	F	F	F
Evening activities (number per month)				
Less than 10	42[E]	746[E]	43	677[E]
10 to 19	58[E]	1,132[E]	76	1,281[E]
20 to 29	92	1,902	93	1,845[E]
30 or more	307	3,694	300	3,494

E use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
1. Includes taking care of children and maternity/paternity leave.
Notes: Figures may not add to total due to rounding. Excludes incidents of sexual assault involving spouses.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1999 and 2004.

Looking at the particular types of sexual offences, police-reported data show that the differences in victimization rates between females and males were consistently notable across all categories of sexual assault. However, the gap between female and male rates, though still noteworthy, was moderately smaller for level 3 sexual assaults and sexual assaults classified as 'other sexual offences', compared to rates for level 1 and 2 sexual assaults. Specifically, in 2007, the female victimization rates for levels 1 and 2 sexual assault were each about 6 times higher than the rates for males. In comparison, aggravated sexual assault (level 3) rates were 4 times greater for women versus men (0.64 versus 0.15 per 100,000

population), and for other sexual offences, the rate for females was about 3 times higher than the rate for males (13 versus 4 per 100,000 population).[9]

Being young, attending school and frequent participation in evening activities are all factors that have been identified as increasing the risk of violent victimization (Perreault, 2008; Gannon and Mihorean, 2005). Youth and students may have higher rates of sexual assault because of lifestyle factors. These individuals tend to engage more frequently in recreational activities, and are in close proximity to many different individuals at any given time (Cass, 2007).

Age is implicated as a risk factor for sexual victimization according to data from victimization surveys and police-reported data, alike. For example, findings from the 2004 GSS indicate that the rate of sexual assault for Canadians aged 15 to 24 was almost 18 times greater than the rate recorded for Canadians aged 55 years and older (5,563 versus 315 per 100,000 population). Police-reported data, which captures information on victims of every age, illustrate that in 2007, over half (58%) of sexual assault victims were under the age of 18, with children under 12 accounting for 25%. The vast majority of these young victims were female (81%). However, nearly all young victims, regardless of sex, experienced a level 1 sexual assault (82%) or a crime recorded under the category of 'other sexual offences' (17%).

Higher rates of sexual assault were also reported to victimization surveys by students and those who frequently engaged in evening activities, such as going out to restaurants, bars or the movies or visiting friends. The 2004 GSS found that students had significantly higher rates of sexual assault in comparison to those whose main activity consisted of working and that those who participated in 30 or more evening activities per month had rates of sexual victimization that were 4.5 times higher than those who engaged in less than 10 evening activities in a month.

Accused most likely to be male, young, and known to victims

While females are disproportionately the victims of sexual offences, males are disproportionately the accused. According to 2007 police-reported data, 97% of persons accused of sexual offences were male, higher than the representation of males among persons accused of all other types of violent crime (78%).

Overall, individuals accused of sexual offences tended to be relatively older than persons accused of other violent crimes. Nevertheless, rates of sexual offending were highest among persons aged 12 to 17 (90 per 100,000 population), followed by 18 to 34 year olds (55 per 100,000 population) and 35 to 44 year olds (42 per 100,000 population).

Both police-reported and victimization surveys suggest that sexual assault incidents are most likely to occur when a victim and offender are known to each other. Over half (55%) of the sexual assaults reported to the GSS in 2004 involved an offender who was a friend or acquaintance of the victim, with stranger assaults accounting for 35% of incidents.[10] In the case of police-reported data, the relationship between the victim and accused was unknown in 19% of cases. However in cases where the relationship could be determined, police-reported data for 2007 show that the victim and accused were known to each other in 82% of sexual assault incidents, and in approximately 18% of incidents, the accused was a stranger to the victim.

Police-reported data, which include victims of every age, indicate that the accused was a family member in nearly a third (31%) of sexual offence incidents that came to the attention of law enforcement in 2007, with extended family members (10%), the victim's parents (10%), or some other immediate family member (7%) identified as the accused most frequently. Less often, relatives accused in sexual assaults were current or former spouses (4%), and rarely were they the victim's child (0.3%). Similar to the proportion of sexual offences where the accused was a relative, 28% of police-reported sexual assaults involved offenders who were casual acquaintances of the victim. To a lesser extent, offenders were identified as friends (8%), authority figures (6%), current or former boyfriends/girlfriends (5%), or business acquaintances (4%) of the victims.[11]

The discrepancy between the two sources in relation to the information each provides on incidents involving family members, may be explained, in part, by the GSS sample. The GSS surveys individuals aged 15 and older, whereas police-reported data cover victims of all ages, including young children. By excluding children from its sample, the GSS cannot provide information on child victims. Research has shown that children are most likely to be victimized by family members (AuCoin, 2005). Thus, the low number of incidents where the victim and accused were related may be a reflection of this exclusion. In addition, it is also important to note that the GSS data on sexual assaults exclude incidents involving spouses.

More serious sexual offences most likely to occur in private residences

According to the 2004 GSS, more than half (51%) of sexual assault incidents occurred in a commercial or institutional establishment,[12] followed by a residence or surrounding location (31%), a street or other public place (12%), or in another location (6%).

The location of the incident varied with the specific offence type. More than half (56%) of sexual attacks occurred in and around a residence; whereas, over half (57%) of incidents of unwanted sexual touching occurred in a commercial establishment. Police-reported data indicate that 68% of aggravated sexual assaults occurred in or around a residence, compared to 65% of the less serious offence, level 1 sexual assault.

Impacts of victimization

Anger, confusion and frustration the most common emotional responses

Similar to the reactions of those who experienced other forms of violent crime, victims of sexual assault reported feeling a multitude of emotions in response to their victimization. The most common emotional reaction was anger (24%), followed by confusion and frustration (20%), shock and disbelief (16%), annoyance (16%), and fear (15%).

The impact of less severe types of sexual offences on victims' abilities to perform their primary activities was similar to the impact reported by victims of other kinds of violent crimes. In about one-fifth (21%) of sexual assaults involving unwanted sexual touching, victims reported being unable to carry out their main activity for the rest of the day, a proportion similar to that of physical assault victims (22%) and slightly smaller than for victims of robbery (35%). However, incidents involving sexual attacks were more likely to result in victims being unable to carry out their main activity, with about half (51%) of victims reporting that they could not do so.

According to the 2004 GSS, most (93%) sexual assaults resulted in no physical injury to the victim, particularly for victims of sexual touching (96%) compared to sexual attack victims (78%). Police-reported data offer comparable findings. Police-reported data from 2007, indicate that overall, 77% of sexual offences resulted in no physical injury to the victim and that a higher proportion of level 1 sexual assaults resulted in no physical injuries (80%), in comparison to level 2 sexual assaults (40%), and aggravated sexual assaults (7%).

Many sexual assault victims do confide in friends and family

While many victims of sexual assault did not report their victimization to police, still many did turn to other informal sources of support, such as friends (72%), family (41%), co-workers (33%), or doctors or nurses (13%). These findings confirm previous research in the area which suggests that victims of sexual assault are most likely to rely on informal sources for support, with more confiding in friends rather than those who are related to them (Ullman et al., 2006).

Victims of sexual assault felt less safe than those who had not been the victim of a crime. For example, 27% of sexual assault victims said that they felt somewhat to very unsafe when walking alone at night in

comparison to 14% of people who had not been criminally victimized. GSS findings also indicate that a higher proportion of sexual assault victims used precautionary measures to protect themselves from crime, relative to those who had not been victimized. One in six (17%) victims of sexual assault indicated that they routinely stay at home at night because they are too afraid to go out alone, compared to 10% who had not been criminally victimized. Similarly, a higher proportion of sexual assault victims (63%) indicated that over the previous 12 months they had changed their routine, activities or avoided certain places, than people who had not been criminally victimized (20%).

Nevertheless, the findings that victims of sexual assault felt less safe and were more apt to use measures to protect themselves from crime than non-victims must be interpreted with caution, since it is not known if these feelings and behaviours are the direct result of their victimization.

Fear and precautionary behaviours similar among victims of sexual assault and robbery

Among victims of violent crime, sexual assault victims resembled robbery victims in their perceptions of safety and use of precautionary measures, but differed somewhat from victims of physical assault. The 2004 GSS found comparable proportions of sexual assault (26%), robbery (25%) and assault (23%) victims felt somewhat to very unsafe when walking alone at night. However, some statistically meaningful differences in the precautionary behaviours of sexual assault victims and victims of physical assault were discovered. Relative to victims of sexual assault, significantly lower proportions of assault victims reported that they routinely stay at home at night for fear of going out alone or that they had changed their routine, activities or avoided certain places to increase their personal safety.

Summary

Victimization data suggest that most incidents of sexual assault are not formally reported, with less than 1 in 10 coming to the attention of police. According to victimization data, the rates of sexual assault remained stable in recent years, while police-reported data show a trend of steady decline in offences coming to the attention of law enforcement. Further, both sources indicate that the majority of sexual offences in Canada are of a less serious nature.

Clearance rates by police and conviction rates in adult criminal courts are lower for sexual offences than for other types of violent crime. However, adults convicted of sexual offences generally tend to receive harsher sentences than those found guilty of other violent offences.

Females and youth were at particular risk of being sexually victimized. Victimization and police-reported data both indicate that the rate of sexual victimization for females was about 5 times the rate for males. Moreover, police-reported data indicate that over half of sexual assault victims in 2007 were children under the age of 18. Those accused of sexual assaults were most often male and the victim and accused were, in the majority of cases, known to each other. Victims of sexual assault commonly reacted to their victimization with anger, confusion and frustration. And while few filed formal reports with police, victims of sexual assault often turned to informal sources for support, typically friends.

Methodology

Data sources

General Social Survey on Victimization

In 2004, Statistics Canada conducted the fourth victimization cycle of the General Social Survey (GSS). The previous cycles had been conducted in 1988, 1993 and 1999. The survey is designed to produce estimates of the extent to which persons are the victims of eight types of offences (assault, sexual assault, robbery, theft of personal property, breaking and entering, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property and vandalism); to examine the risk factors associated with victimization; to examine the rates of reporting to the police; and to evaluate the fear of crime and public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system.

The GSS target population includes all non-institutionalized persons aged 15 and older. In 2004, the GSS sample consisted of 24,000 households in the provinces. Households were selected using random digit dialling, which yielded a response rate of 75%. The use of telephones for sample selection and data collection means that the 2004 GSS sample in the provinces represents only the 96% of the population that has telephone service.

Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey

The UCR Survey was developed in 1962 with the cooperation and assistance of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. UCR Survey data reflects reported crime that has been substantiated through police investigation from all separate federal, provincial and municipal police services in Canada. There are currently two versions of the UCR Survey: aggregate and incident-based microdata.

Aggregate UCR Survey

The Aggregate UCR Survey includes the number of reported offences, actual offences, offences cleared by charge or cleared otherwise, persons charged (by sex and by adult/youth breakdown) and those not charged. It does not include victim or incident characteristics. Coverage of the UCR Survey in 2007 was at 99.9% of the caseload of all police services in Canada.

Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey

The Incident-based UCR2 Survey captures detailed information on individual criminal incidents reported to police, including characteristics of victims, accused persons and incidents. Police services switch over from the Aggregate to the Incident-based Survey as their records management systems become capable of providing this level of detail. Coverage of the UCR2 Survey for 2007 represented 94% of the population in Canada.

Data limitations

The data that are used in this profile are based on estimates drawn from a sample of the Canadian population, and they are therefore subject to sampling error. The difference between the estimate obtained from a sample and the estimate based on the total population is sampling error.

This profile uses the coefficient of variation (CV) to measure sampling error. Any estimate with a high CV (more than 33.3%) was not published because it was too unreliable.

When we compare estimates to detect significant differences, we test the hypothesis that the difference between two estimates is zero. We construct a 95% confidence interval around this difference, and if the interval contains zero, we conclude that the difference is not significant. However, if the confidence

interval does not contain zero, we conclude that there is a significant difference between the two estimates.

Additionally, non-sampling errors may also have been introduced. Non-sampling errors may include a respondent's refusal to report, a respondent's inability to remember or report events accurately, or errors in the coding or processing of the data. Also, people who could not speak English or French well enough to take part in the survey were not included. For these reasons, the data on victimization should be used with caution.

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Endnotes

1. The GSS and UCR surveys are very different in survey type, coverage, scope, and source of information. For instance, the GSS is a sample survey, representing the non-institutionalized Canadian population aged 15 years or over. In comparison, the aggregate UCR survey is a census of all incidents reported by police services across Canada. The UCR2 captures detailed information on individual criminal incidents reported to selected police services, including characteristics of incidents, victims and accused persons; coverage of the UCR2 Survey for 2007 incident counts represented approximately 94% of the population of Canada, while coverage for victims and accused persons counts represented approximately 90%. In addition, sexual assault data from the GSS exclude incidents involving spouses, which are captured in a separate survey module on spousal violence; whereas police-reported data on sexual offences include those incidents involving spouses.
2. The target population for the 2004 cycle of the GSS is all persons 15 years of age and older in Canada, excluding residents of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, as well as full-time residents of institutions.
3. GSS data on sexual assault exclude incidents of spousal sexual assault. An in-depth module in the GSS addresses the issue of spousal violence separately. Overall, an estimated 653,000 women and 546,000 men (representing 7% and 6%, respectively) reported some type of violence by a common-law or marital partner in the 5 years preceding the 2004 GSS.
4. Respondents could provide multiple responses. Therefore, percentages will exceed 100% when summed.
5. For most provinces, incidents of sexual assault were too low to produce reliable estimates using data from the GSS. Therefore, provincial data on sexual assaults from the GSS is not presented in this study.
6. The 2004 GSS also showed that the proportion of sexual assault incidents that did not come to the attention of police varied by province but, in most cases, these inter-provincial variations were not statistically meaningful. Nevertheless, the proportion of sexual assaults not reported to police was significantly higher in Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan in comparison to Ontario. Otherwise, no statistically significant inter-provincial differences in non-reporting were found.
7. Includes sexual assault with a weapon (level 2) and aggravated sexual assault (level 3).
8. GSS data show no significant difference in the proportion of male and female sexual assault victims who reported the incident to police.
9. Among the specific offence types recorded on the GSS, the rate of unwanted sexual touching was about 5 times higher for females in comparison to males (2,632 versus 549 per 100,000 population). The rate of sexual attacks for women was 598 incidents per 100,000 population. However, a comparable figure could not be produced for men, as the number of sexual attacks reported by men were too few to enable this type of analysis.
10. Incidents involving family members and other relations were too few in number to enable analysis with data from the 2004 GSS.
11. Percentages are based on the total number of incidents where the relationship between the victim and accused was known.
12. Commercial and institutional establishments include restaurants and bars, schools and school grounds, commercial and office buildings, shopping centres, hospitals, prisons, or rehabilitation centres.

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